

Language Development and Communication

Several measures of children’s language skills provided information about children’s understanding of spoken words, their ability to name letters of the alphabet, their ability to break spoken words into parts (i.e., phonemic awareness), and their understanding of story and print concepts. Children’s performance in each of these areas is presented in this section.

North Carolina kindergartners varied in their understanding of spoken words. The average score of 97 on this measure was lower than the national average of 100.

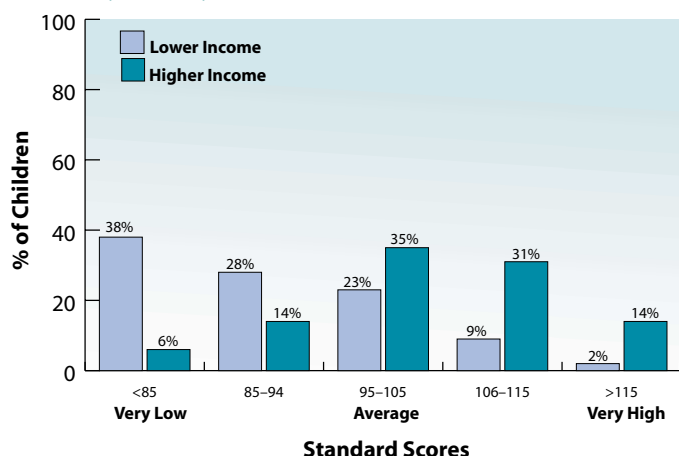
More North Carolina children scored very low and fewer children scored very high when compared to national norms. (See Table 4.)

Table 4
Understanding of Spoken Words

	NC	National Norms ^d
% with very low scores (<85)	21%	16%
% with very high scores (>115)	8%	16%

This pattern was also evident in a measure of children’s ability to recognize letters of the alphabet and simple words. North Carolina kindergartners varied in these skills. Some children could not correctly identify any letters of the alphabet that were shown to them while others could read words. North Carolina’s average score of 93 on this measure was lower than the national average of 100. Compared to national norms, more NC kindergartners had very low scores (28% in NC vs. 16% nationally) and fewer NC kindergartners had very high scores (4% in NC vs. 16% nationally).

Figure 5
Understanding of Spoken Words by Family Income



On a measure of phonemic awareness, 39% of NC kindergartners could not answer correctly any items. Of those kindergartners who were able to answer at least 1 item correctly, the average number of correct items was 2. Based on national norms, children between the ages of 5 and 5½ years should be able to answer correctly an average of 3 items. Although NC kindergartners were below average on this phonemic awareness measure, it is important to realize that many children this age are just beginning to master this skill.²⁵

The NC SRA also included information about kindergartners’ understanding of books. Many children (87%) could identify the front of a book. More than half (64%) understood that one reads from left to right.

Language and communication skills differed greatly between children from lower-income and higher-income families. These differences were significant for each skill measured—children’s understanding of spoken words, their ability to name letters